

COOPERATIVE FEEDING OF YOUNG AT THE NEST BY
FISCHER'S STARLING *SPREO FISCHERI*

John Miskell

On 7 May 1977 a nest of Fischer's Starling was found in the top of a thorn bush, about 2.5 m above the ground, at the edge of a water pan, approximately 2 km north of Wajir, in the North Eastern Province of Kenya. The nest was built of coarse grasses and was completely roofed over with the opening above a small ramp facing south. The nest contained three well developed fully feathered young. They differed from the adults primarily by having bright yellow instead of black bills, and black rather than pale cream eyes. The young and adult birds were observed from a distance of 4 m for about two hours (08.00-10.00 hrs) and for another hour (08.00-09.00 hrs) the following day. Although the three young looked very much the same, their actions showed that they were not equally developed. One was noticeably more active than the others and was eventually enticed out of the nest by an adult with a butterfly in its beak. It 'flew' about a foot and was fed by the adult. It spent some time in the bush and then returned to the nest. On my arrival at the nest on 8 May one of the young was already outside and the other two were coaxed out a little later, but one of the latter stayed out for only a very short time.

On two occasions, three adults arrived at the nest with food at nearly the same time. When this happened they formed a queue and waited their turn to feed the young. The second time this happened the third adult had only just (about 30 seconds) left the nest when another adult arrived with a butterfly in its beak. This was either a fourth adult or, highly unlikely, one of the earlier adults which had made by far the quickest return trip to the nest that I observed. It put its head into the nest but, apparently since they had all just been fed, none of the young birds took the food. After a few seconds the adult took its head out of the nest and, with the butterfly still in its beak, flew off to a second Fischer's nest about 25 m away and fed a young bird there.

This second nest was very much like the first, but was about 3 m above the ground. Like the first, and that of a Superb Starling *S. superbus* not far away, its entrance also faced south. As the nest was high I was not able to see the young except when they poked their heads out. Only two young were observed at this nest. They did not appear to be nearly as well developed as those in the first nest, and they were not seen to leave the nest. On one occasion three adults were also observed together at this nest.

The adults fed the young entirely on butterflies and caterpillars. Sometimes after being fed, a young bird would do a quick 'about face', present its vent to the adult which had fed it, and discharge a sac of excrement which the adult bird would take in its beak. If the sac was large the adult would fly away with it, but if it was small the adult would eat it. The sacs seemed dry on the outside, but on the occasions when they were eaten they were ruptured and some of the white waste matter was noticed on the adult's bill.

Although cooperative feeding has been recorded for the Superb Starling, and the two oxpeckers *Buphagus africanus* (Yellow-billed) and *B. erythro-rhynchus* (Grimes 1976), it has not, to my knowledge, previously been recorded for Fischer's Starling. The fact that more than two adult birds carrying food were seen together at the nest on several occasions demonstrates that cooperative feeding does occur with this species. Also, the fact that one

adult bird was definitely seen to visit two nests would seem to indicate that this group of birds was operating two nests simultaneously.

REFERENCE

GRIMES, L.G. 1976. The occurrence of cooperative breeding behaviour in African birds. *Ostrich* 47: 1-15.

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GCB.

ERRATA

The following mistakes occurred in the June *Scopus* for which I apologize.

1. p.31, *Sterna dougallii* Roseate Tern, 2nd pa, line 7: should read mainly red bill (not mainly white).
2. p.33, *Sterna nigra* Black Tern. The author writes: I overlooked a sight record of one at Lake Nakuru, 23 September 1953 (Wallace, D.I.M. 1975. Rare and unusual Palaearctic birds in central Kenya in 1953. *EAHNS Bulletin* 1975: 24-31).
3. p.47, the reference 'Britton 1976' should be Britton, P.L. & Osborne, T.O. 1976.
4. p.41, *Hieraaetus pennatus* Booted Eagle: the following were omitted: one on four dates 12 Jan-28 Feb 76 (PL); 2D, 28 Feb 76 (DJP).
5. p.44, Black-shouldered Kite note, 2nd pa, line 3: c.4.5m should have been c.1.5m.
6. I am sorry that the price was omitted from the front cover, that the text inside the front and back covers had been stuck in, and that the trimming was badly done.

GCB.